LIU, Jean M.

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NARRATOR

Jean M. Liu
Signature of narrator

Jean Moon Liu
Name of narrator

898 Coach Drive
Address

Oakland, Ca 94605

(dated) 7-14-85

INTERVIEWER

_____
Signature of interviewer

_____
Name of interviewer

_____
Address of interviewer

_____

(dated) _____

Accepted for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project

by Kathryn A. Hughes (Project Director) 10/10/85 (Dated)

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Oakland Neighborhood
History Project

Chinese / Earthquake 1906 displacement

General Topic of Interview Chinese in W. Oakland

Date 9-23-81 Place 8198 Coach Dr. Length

Narrator	Interviewer
Name Jean Liu	Name Eleanor Swent
Address 8198 Coach Dr.	Address One King Av
Oakland CA - 94605	Piedmont - CA - 94611
Name & address of relative, friend	Relationship to narrator [friend, neighbor, etc.]
Dr Barry R. Liu	none
6414 Estates Dr. - Oakland 94611	
Birthplace Oakland	Length of acquaintance none
Birthdate Aug. 13 - 1918	Occasion of interview Oakland
Occupation(s) accountant	Neighborhood History Project

Interview Data

Subjects covered, in approximate order, spelling out names of persons and places mentioned

Estimated Time on Tape	Contents
70 min - 45 on side A	Great grandfather came to S.F. in 1850's grandfather - Lee King - came in 1871 to help his older brother in a small business. Brother lost at sea - L.H. - 13 yrs old - inherited business. Experimented w. tin cans to preserve food - est. cannery in S.F. - In 1904 est. Pacific Coast Cannery at 12th & Pine Oak - to be near R.R. Emp. Port. Tel. Early spring - asparagus then fruits (grapes, cherries, peaches, apricots, pears) & tomatoes. Chinese est. at 23rd - Grove & 7th - Webster. W.W.I - Hoover's relief project - canned goods sent to Europe. 2nd cannery for fish - est. in Monterey - another in Antioch -

A

Use back of sheet if necessary

Cannery Row

Benefactor to Fam. Ass'n - Lew-Quan-Cheong-Chew. Pres. of Bank of Canton, S.F. and China Mail Steamship Ass'n. Also est. cotton plantation in Mexicali. Chinese conscripted for Mexico passed through S.F. L.H. built 2-block Chinatown in Mexicali. Invested in importation of art objects, hotels in S.F. First lived on 8th St. on Oakland - 1st Chinese to live there - later, large home on Stowe & Lakeshore. Expanded to accomodate 7 children and families as they married. Built another home up on Lakeshore - Mother still lives there - Lit. Passable English.

Employees of cannery not Chinese - didn't want to leave S.F.

"many women in blue uniforms, with white collars, rolled up sleeves, rubber gloves... early in the morning... paid per bucket... moving machines hot vats... very intriguing just to watch rows of cans come bouncing along."

The crash came in 1927-29. Business suffered. "I don't know whether my grandfather ever really recovered."

Lakeview School, Oakland High, Berkeley U.

W. Oakland was residential - some beautiful large homes - cannery now a storage facility -

Because of his business he had influential Caucasian friends who helped him. Fruit orchards were in Hayward - "Uncle Joe" Linas.

Lew King was my mother's father. My father's father came to Nevada City. there were 2 distinct ethnic groups of Chinese - All from Canton, mother's father from Toisan, father's father from Hoiping. Another group - Heung Sang Sze Yup group - different - Sam Yup / Heung Sang people kept separate. there were class distinctions then -

"In those days we never had this kind of thing [ethnic, race] brought to light. You weren't affected by it. I actually went to an integrated school without calling it that." ... Just a handful of Blacks

Italians moved to Temescal - Now the Chinese are out in the suburbs. Chinese always went to S.F. for dinner - Now ~~sometimes~~ we stay in Oakland.

First Dollar ~~store~~ was at 11th & Washington.

Family Associations are now social - Offshoots in Oakland.

Grandfather became a Presbyterian in later life - Bought a car.

Jean's mother was one of 1st women drivers in Oakland.

Grandmother embroidered, sewed. Feet bound - Not homesick for China - Went back to visit but found China not for him.

Side B He became very American - Wife bobbed her hair in 20's but never learned English - Had a Japanese man housekeeper, Chinese cook - Neither mother nor grandmother observed Chinese customs.

But "Chinese" customs celebrated more in U.S. than in China - they cling more to old traditions. they are eating mooncakes now.

[N.B. not "we"]. Has met visitors from PRC but not immigrants. They have to assimilate and integrate. Hong Kong brides - brought over some very bad habits. Urban problems - mixtures of ethnic groups - people are socially climbing - Blacks from the South -

L. Sweet
Jean Liu - 9/25/81

WORKSHOP NOTES

Mrs. Jean Liu is a beautiful, charming, well-educated woman "of Chinese background" but thoroughly American. Her mother was one of the first women in Oakland to drive a car. Her Chinese-born grandmother bobbed her hair in the '20's, but had bound feet! Grandfather Lew Hing owned the Pacific Coast Cannery in W. Oakland, employing many people - Portuguese & Italians mostly. He bought a house on 8th St. near Webster - now the heart of Oakland's Chinatown - later he built a large house on Lakeshore - He became very influential in both Chinese & Caucasian society - in S.F. & Oakland.

She is an accountant works for Peat Marwick & Mitchell V.C. grad

Particularly interesting elements of the tape are Jean's recollections of her grandfather's cannery — driving to Hayward to contract for fruit - Oakland high school when no one was aware of ethnic and racial problems -

On Side B, near the end of the tape, she discusses the new immigrants from China - Hong Kong brides and others - and the problems they are causing - they bring over bad habits - they have to learn to assimilate and integrate - "It's the same thing over again." they cause "urban problems." Her children have married Caucasians.
When she speaks of the Chinese immigrants who are observing the autumn harvest festival at the time of the interview, she says "they."

LIU, JEAN

#5919

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES CENTER

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LEW HING AND THE PACIFIC COAST CANNING COMPANY

[Biographical essay by Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Sonoma State Anthropological Studies Center for the Cypress Freeway Replacement Project, Caltrans District 4. Essay based on interview with Hing's granddaughter, Jean Liu, by Lee Swent, September 23rd, 1981, for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project (as attached). Additional information from The Chinese of Oakland: Unsung Builders.]

One of the early pivotal figures in Oakland's Chinese-American community was the entrepreneur, Lew Hing. Hing came to California from the Kwangtung Province of China in 1871 at the age of 12. The fourth child in the family he was brought to California to help his older brother, the first son, who had immigrated to San Francisco in the late 1860s. On a return visit to China Hing's brother was drowned when his ship burned off the coast of Japan. Lew Hing was thus left at the age of 13 to run their Commercial Street business alone.

Over the years he experimented with food processing and was involved in a small cannery at the northeast corner of Sacramento and Stockton Streets. By trial and error Lew Hing improved on early canning methods and his business began to prosper. He married a Chinese-born woman [family name unknown] of obvious high status--her feet were bound ---and the couple eventually had seven children, three sons and four daughters. One daughter was the mother of Jean Liu, who was interviewed in 1981 (attached).

In 1904 Lew Hing organized the Pacific Coast Canning Company at Twelfth and Pine Streets on the edge of West Oakland. The facility apparently included West Oakland's first concrete building and was located next to the Southern Pacific tracks. A loading spur ran into the complex. The cannery processed asparagus, tomatoes, and most local fruits for export throughout the United States and Europe. Pacific Coast Canning Company was an important seasonal employer for the Portuguese, Italian, Slavic and later Mexican immigrant women of West Oakland and it figures prominently in the memories of many of those interviewed for the Cypress Freeway Replacement Oral History Project. It is unclear whether or not the cannery employed Chinese in any significant numbers.

Following the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake Hing set up temporary camps and a food kitchen, presumably for the many Chinese who fled to Oakland from San Francisco's devastated Chinatown. Lew Hing's family had fortuitously returned to China on a visit and were spared. The family's San Francisco home and all their possessions, however, were lost in the disaster. Hing immediately purchased a home on 8th Street between Harrison and Alice in Oakland. This area quickly became the locus of a new Chinatown.

In addition to the Pacific Coast Canning Company, Lew Hing also owned a sardine cannery in Monterey on 'Cannery Row,' as the area is now called today. He was also involved in the West Coast Canning Company in Antioch, served as the President of both the Bank of Canton and the China Mail Steamship Company Line in San Francisco and helped design and develop a worker's town for Chinese who were imported to work on his Mexicali, Mexico, cotton plantation. Due to the restrictions of the Chinese Exclusion Act it is unclear how Hing purchased his property and businesses, and whether or not he used his many influential Caucasian friends for help, or not.

The Crash of 1929 profoundly affected the fortunes of the family. As a consequence the Pacific Coast Canning Company closed. Lew Hing never recovered from this trauma and died apparently in 1934 (The Chinese of Oakland: Unsung Builders, p. 49.)

Jean Liu, granddaughter of Lew Hing, was born in Oakland and was raised in her grandparent's house along Lake Merritt. She attended Lakeview School, Oakland High School, and U.C. Berkeley. During the 1960s Mrs. Liu was a social worker at the YMCA in San Francisco. This interview includes her prepared notes on her family history, her personal memories of the Pacific Coast Canning Company, and memories of her visits to both Hong Kong and Mainland China in the 1970s.

LIU, JEAN

OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Jean Liu

[Interview conducted September 23, 1981 in Oakland, California by Lee Swent for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project. Transcription prepared by Karana Hattersley-Drayton, August 1996, for the Cypress Freeway Replacement Project (Sonoma State University Anthropological Studies Center for Caltrans District 4)].

[Transcriber's note: Much of the first portion of the tape apparently consists of passages read from a prepared manuscript. These sections are enclosed within quotations. Also, due to the focus of the Caltrans research portions of the interview which do not relate to West Oakland, or to ethnic heritage and history, are summarized only.]

[Tape is cued up.]

Lee Swent: "All right Jean, I think it would be interesting if you would begin telling about your grandfather. He was the first one in your family to come and he came a long long time ago."

Jean Liu: "Actually, his father was over here in the 1850s."

Swent: "This was your great-grandfather?"

Liu: "That's my great-grandfather. 'And he came to San Francisco with one of many groups of Chinese to look for a more prosperous way of life. And he was disappointed to find only small opportunities open to the Chinese.'"

Swent: "Now, did he come from Southern China?"

Liu: "He did come from Canton. 'And he came with a group of people who were conscripted for Chinese labor to work the railroads. And it was hard manual labor and the Chinese were decentralized to lonely open areas away from San Francisco to help build the railroads in the early Western United States history. So he stayed in [the] San Francisco area and carried a backpack and camped hither and yon along the shores of San Francisco Bay for two months. Gold was recently discovered in California and it can be assumed that life was budding in San Francisco and there were boisterous periods on the Barbary Coast. Being Chinese, such a lifestyle was not the accepted Chinese way. Furthermore, not many Chinese understood the English language and sought comfort and socialability among their own ethnic group. He

experienced some disappointment and loneliness. He did not find a substantial job or adequate housing. So, such frustration caused him to return to China within two months.

In the late 1860s his first son came to San Francisco to try his chance in the new world, for a new life and to look for new opportunities which were expanding. The lust for gold brought many people from many directions to San Francisco. By this time, various groups of Chinese began to develop family associations which provided leadership, socialability and housing for many single men in the area now known as San Francisco's Chinatown.'"

Swent: "And of course the single men was because they were not allowed to bring their wives."

Liu: "Correct. See most of the Chinese at that time were brought over here to work the railroads and there were no provisions for families to come. Because housing for one thing was inadequate. And settling was a major factor for all the people."

Swent: "I believe that apart from that, I think there was a law, wasn't there? Or was that later? [The two women discuss this. Mrs. Liu is not aware of this law. *(Ed. note: Swent is referring to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which did not prohibit women per se. It did prohibit new immigration except among the merchant and educated classes. Chinese workers who remained in California could not send for their wives, sweethearts or families. Also they could not return to China and legally re-enter the United States. The problem was compounded by the fact that so few Chinese women had come to California during the prior era of unrestricted immigration. Thus a substantial, and aging bachelor community developed in American Chinatowns. See Stanford M. Lyman, "Strangers in the Cities: The Chinese on the Urban Frontier," in Ethnic Conflict in California History.)*]

Liu: "But you see, most of the men that did come over were conscripted to come to do labor work in the mines or on the railroads. So not too many of them really settled in San Francisco but they went out into the various camps in areas in California."

Swent: "They probably really didn't intend to stay...."

Liu: "Many of them did not. Many of them had the feeling they want to come over here to make some money so that they can return to China to retire. In fact, they dreamed about, this is a tradition, to return to China to be with their family again in China.

As I started to say, 'These Chinese groups that did stay in San Francisco area, they began to develop family groups. And these groups provided close association with persons with the same surname to help each other as brothers. So my grandfather's older brother who was number one son, established a small business on Commercial Street which runs between Kearney and Grant Avenue. In about two years he wanted to return to Canton to visit his family. So he urged his younger brother, which was my grandfather (and he was number four child of the family) and only age twelve to come to America to assist him in his growing business. So when my grandfather, who is Lew Hing, arrived in San Francisco in 1871 after a long voyage by ship which took almost a month, his older brother returned to China by ship for a visit. In those days the ships were square rigged sailboats and voyages were rough. Steamships, for longer voyages, were a later development. As the ship reached within sight of Japan (this is where his brother was returning to China) the ship was engulfed in flames of a great fire and sunk. And his brother was a tall, large-framed man and a good swimmer. And it was believed that he alone could have probably swam safely to shore. But in his eagerness to help as many persons as possible, many passengers fiercely hung on to him for life. And the weight and the disorder of the frightening situation caused all to drown.

'So, my grandfather, Lew Hing, at the age of 13 years-old, was left in San Francisco to continue the small business of his older brother. He was eager to learn English so he did so by attending a church mission school in the evenings. He became interested in making metal containers for storage of various sundry things. His interests developed in the idea for canning foodstuffs as a method of preserving food. A small cannery was located on the northeast corner of Sacramento and Stockton Street in San Francisco. There was a period of trial and error and sometimes food would ferment in the tin cans, due to bacterial action which caused cans to swell and even explode. And food became too poisonous for consumption. Soon successful methods outnumbered unsuccessful ones and his business began to flourish. In time he married and had a family of three sons and four daughters.

'In 1904, Lew Hing organized the Pacific Coast Canning Company in Oakland, California, at 12th and Pine Street.'"

Swent: "Do you know why he happened to come over to Oakland?"

Liu: "I'm going to tell you that, uh-huh. Yeah, 'He purchased two blocks of land in anticipation that the cannery would expand. And in doing so he built the first concrete building in that part of Oakland, and expanded the business. The machinery required was tremendous and was

updated for the period. The concept of going to Oakland location was to place the cannery next to the railroad tracks for more efficient transportation of his canned products to reach throughout the United States and European continent."

Swent: "This must have been one of the first canneries in the whole United States."

Liu: "Oh no. It probably wasn't. I think there was a series of canneries developed at that time because processing of food now became an issue. Because of course at that time they didn't even have refrigeration yet. They only had dried food and maybe salted or sugared types of food for preservation. 'So canned items at that cannery rotated in early spring from asparagus, and when that was finished then they canned cherries, and then apricots and then peaches and pears and grapes and lots of tomatoes. The cannery gave many hundreds of jobs to the Portuguese and Italian residents who were living in that area.

In 1906, the earthquake of San Francisco brought many Chinese to Oakland. His family was in China for a visit at that time so they did not experience the earthquake. But their home and all their belongings in San Francisco were buried under and were not recoverable. He moved immediately to Oakland. And he arranged to contribute what he could to the victims of disaster. He set up many temporary tents on the cannery grounds for housing and hired people to cook many meals through this adjustment period. For the Chinese who came to Oakland because of the earthquake disaster, many grouped and started some centers for a Chinatown in Oakland. A group started in the area of 22nd and 23rd and San Pablo and Grove Street. And another larger group started in the area of 7th and 8th and Webster Streets in Oakland, which is now the present location of Oakland's Chinatown.

During World War I, Herbert Hoover who later became President of the United States, headed a food rehabilitation program in Belgium, for the Europeans. The effort assisted in winning the War. And so canned food products from the Pacific Coast Canning Company also reached to some of these nations in Europe and helped to contribute to the food program. So preservation of food in cans was a new concept which was readily accepted and helped to succeed in the War effort.'

And as Pacific Coast Canning Company prospered, my grandfather [invested in other projects and businesses.] He also, a few years later, expanded his canning business in Monterey, California, for the Monterey sardines, at a location now known as Cannery Row. It was said that the sardines were so plentiful that they actually swam their way into the cannery [slight laugh].

He expanded another cannery in Antioch, California, known as the West Coast Canning Company, which was located along the San Pablo Bay shores.' [Tape is turned off.] Ok. 'He also became a benefactor to the Lung Kong Tien Yee Association, the family association for the families of Liu, Kwan, Jung and Jew. He became President of the Bank of Canton in San Francisco. He was President of the China Mail Steamship Line in San Francisco.

He developed a business in a cotton plantation in Mexicali, Mexico known as Wah Muck. Many Chinese were conscripted directly from China to Mexicali via San Francisco. In this conscription it was arranged with the United States government that the laborers would pass through San Francisco without stop and boarded onto trains to Mexicali, Mexico. Hundreds of Chinese came from China to work on the cotton fields. Lew Hing invested and developed a street of two to three blocks long of various Chinese businesses to accommodate the needs of the workers at that time. In effect, a Chinatown was built and its remnants are still in existence this day in Mexicali.

He also invested into import-export of art goods for Sing Chong and for Wah companies. He invested into import-export of wholesale foodstuffs from China, known as the Hop Wah Lung Company. He invested and developed two hotels in San Francisco Chinatown, one on the south side of Clay Street between Grant and Stockton Streets and the Republic Hotel on Grant Avenue near Sacramento Street. He also had other real estate investments and ventures.'"

Swent: "But he kept his home-"

Liu: "In Oakland."

Swent: "In Oakland."

Liu: "He first settled on 8th Street in Oakland, 8th Street between Harrison and Alice. In fact, he was the first Chinese I think that lived in that area. He walked right up to this man who owned this house, was more like a two-storey building, and offered him a few thousand dollars. And the man just packed his little suitcase and left the premises with the money. And he had his house, all fully furnished. And by the time the family came back from China, they just moved right into the house."

Swent: "This is after the earthquake."

Liu: "After the earthquake. And after there they moved to a large home on the edge of Lake Merritt which is now known as, on Stow Avenue, and Lakeshore Avenue, right at the bend of Lakeshore. And they lived there for a few years. And it

was a large home, in fact he expanded that home with the idea that his children would marry and their children would come back to live with him. This is a very old Chinese concept."

Swent: "Did they do it?"

Liu: "They did it for a while. But the businesses and the ... needs of the children in the family outgrew that type of situation. And they gradually moved away."

Swent: "Became more Americanized."

Liu: "...Yes. Correct. And he built himself another home on Lakeshore Avenue.... [This home is still there.]

Swent: "You said earlier that you were 16 when your grandfather died so you have clear memories of him. How was his English? Did he learn good English?"

Liu: "Uh, his English was passable. He knew how to write English. He always signs his name and he knows how to read the newspaper, the English newspaper and so forth. In fact, in his later years he became blind. And he was always very interested in the news. He would ask me, 'What's the headlines say?' [Laughs]"

Swent: "Do you know anything else that you could say about the cannery? It's interesting that most of the employees apparently were Portuguese and you mentioned Italian. And I know that some of the Mexican people worked there also. There were not many Chinese employees there."

Liu: "No, not when he first started, not when he first started."

Swent: "I wonder why this was?"

Liu: "It was difficult to get the Chinese from San Francisco decentralized to come to Oakland. They had ferry boats but it was like going to the country for them. They didn't leave the area of the San Francisco Chinatown too readily. Even to this day it's more or less like that."

Swent: "...now he employed both men and women in these canneries, didn't he?"

Liu: "Oh yes. I remember many many women in blue uniforms and maybe small little white collars and roll-up sleeves. And they used to wear ... rubber gloves to work."

Swent: "Now were the uniforms provided for them or did they buy them, do you know?"

Liu: "I'm not sure. I think they probably had to provide their own uniforms. I don't remember that they were distributed for them. But these women worked very very hard. And they would come very early in the morning and actually, it was more like ... piece work. They would have to peel the vegetables and seed them and put them in buckets. And they were paid per bucket. And then the buckets of food would be poured into a runner, a moving machinery that would move it along into the vats. And they would go into these very hot baths. And from there they would go into some sugar syrupy-type of vat, which is also hot. And eventually they get into these cans. And then they would rotate into---it was very interesting, it was very intriguing for anybody just to watch because it was all done by machinery and you could see these rows of cans come bouncing along [laughs]. And then they would reach an area, the fruit would still be very very hot, and they would be hermetically sealed. And then they would go into the label room. And from there, they're put into cases and put onto freight trains."

Swent: "And what happened to this cannery? Did he sell it or-"

Liu: "No, during, if you will remember history, the Crash came in 1927-28-29. So many many businesses were lost at that time. And this is one of the businesses that suffered."

Swent: "Well. So it just closed?"

Liu: "It just closed down."

Swent: "That's too bad, isn't it?"

Liu: "It is. It's a sad thing that happened. I don't know whether my grandfather really fully recovered from that or not. But, it was a a traumatic thing for him. [There is some distraction from a tv in the background.]"

Swent: "So, you were born on the lake?"

Liu: "Yes."

Swent: "In Oakland. In this big home that your grandfather had?"

Liu: "That's correct."

Swent: "So where did you go to school then?"

Liu: "Well I went to Lakeview School which is about three blocks from there. And I went to Oakland High School. And then went on to Berkeley."

Swent: "So you didn't have contact with West Oakland except that you used to go down and visit the cannery once in a while?"

Liu: "I remember as a youngster, we used to go down there to either pick up Grandpa or visit."

Swent: "What did you think about West Oakland? Did you have any impressions of it?"

Liu: "Well, it was just another segment of town, at that time. It was residential. There were some large homes down there. I remember seeing some very beautiful homes down there. And there were also smaller homes. The area where the cannery is is actually the edge of Oakland."

Swent: "What was the address of the cannery?"

Liu: "Twelfth and Pine. And so it was right next to the railroad tracks.... [A loading spur] ran into the cannery."

Swent: "And you said that concrete building is still there?"

Liu: "Yes it is. The last time I was in that area, I was interested to see what it looked like. And parts of it have been [dismantled]. I remember that there's this one concrete building still there and I think some moving company is using it for storage...."

Swent: "Now in those days, when your grandfather was buying his property and buying homes and so on, it wasn't always easy for a Chinese to buy property."

Liu: "No, it wasn't."

Swent: "Did he ever say anything? Do you have any recollections about this?"

Liu: "No, I never heard of, I've never heard him mention anything like this. ...but you see, he knew how to speak English, and he was a man of means and maybe it just didn't happen that way. I just don't understand. I think he probably had other people helping him find property to buy."

Swent: "He moved out of Chinatown right away."

Liu: "...because of his business he did have some very influential Caucasian friends. And they were always around to help him, when there was the need."

Swent: "...do you know where the fruits came from? Did any of the fruits come from Fruitvale?"

Liu: "Well much of it came from Hayward. I remember, I remember driving out there with him, with my mother. It used to take like an hour and a half maybe [laughs] to get out to Hayward! Driving out there. But I remember visiting the fruit orchards and he would actually go out there and buy the fruit, from a man right there. I guess it would be two months of ripening, and so forth. He would buy it, buy it from him, right there. Yes. I remember the man's name very well. His name was---I used to call him Uncle Bill and his name was Joe Lemas. He used to have a big fruit ranch in Hayward. I wouldn't say that all the fruit came from him but I know that this is one area."

Swent: "And it came by train then, from Hayward?"

Liu: "I'm not sure how it came. I'm not sure how it came. It's possible. There was a train running out that way."

Swent: "And this cannery then with all of these fruits and vegetables must have been open most of the year...."

Liu: "Oh yes. As soon as one fruit was finished, then they started to harvest another one. It just came right in time .... Sometimes they'd use the same machinery, but sometimes some machineries were a little bit different from the others, because of size, shape of the fruit, and so forth. And then it would just be continuous. All through summer. Of course the winter months, it was not in operation."

Swent: "Oh. It closed in the winter."

Liu: "Correct. And very early the next year, they would start with asparagus first because that's the first vegetable that comes in the spring."

Swent: "Did you have these canned things in your home...?"

Liu: "Oh sure, definitely...."

Swent: "So the Depression obviously had a big influence in your family. What about the Second World War? Did that-"

Liu: "By that time he has passed on already."

Swent: "But what about your [father]."

Liu: "My father was connected with New York Life Insurance Company."

Swent: "And this Lew Hing was your father's father?"

Liu: "No, this is my mother's father. ...my father's father (that's another story) but he also came from China,

but they settled in Nevada City, in the gold country. They had a little general store up there. [They too were from Kwangtung Province. Lew Hing was incidentally from Toishan District. There were two distinct groups of Chinese in the Nevada City area. In Nevada City there were Sze Yup (including Hoiping) people. Also Toishan who spoke a somewhat different dialect. These groups feuded constantly. When her mother was young intermarriage between groups was not allowed. When her mother married her father was this a "liberal thing?" Her mother's generation began to move away from the social and class distinctions which had prevailed in China. Now, Mrs. Liu feels, that people are more modernized and they overlook these old world distinctions and barriers.]

[Ms. Swent asks Mrs. Liu if she was aware of the variety of ethnic groups in West Oakland, when she was growing up. No, not particularly. Was Oakland High integrated? Yes, there were a wide variety of kids there during her time. Mrs. Liu still has numerous Caucasian friends from her school days. There were very few Chinese at the school then. She remembers only 4 or 5 blacks who attended her school. These kids fit in well and weren't ostracized. Swent notes the impact on demographics from World War II.]

Swent: "Did your family ...still consider San Francisco as their central, important place?"

Liu: "My mother was born in San Francisco. Even when we were growing up, whenever we would want to go to dinner, even for a family dinner, we would think first, hopping in our car, and go to San Francisco to have dinner. I mean, it was nothing to just do that. And even though at one time we had to take the ferry to go over, we just allowed the time it would take to go over. It was just very automatic. [Now, 1981, she feels that there are some excellent restaurants in Oakland and there is no parking problem. Thus they usually eat out in Oakland.]

Swent: "...I think that Milton Sherman's [?] first Dollar Store was in West Oakland, was it?"

Liu: "...no it was down on either Tenth and Washington or Eleventh and Washington Street. I think it was probably Eleventh and Washington Streets. [The two women discuss locations of various Dollar Stores. Milton had two sisters. His father, Mr. Shoong, was quite enterprising. He established this chain. *(Ed note: See also p. 51 The Chinese of Oakland: Unsung Builders.)*]

Swent: "Now, did these family associations still play much of a part?"

Liu: "Yes in fact I would say probably the 3rd generation have joined. But now they have become social groups. [These associations sponsor family dinners and such. Swent wonders if they still help new immigrants to find jobs and acculturate?] Yes. Many of them acquire buildings where they would have sleeping quarters for the single men. Then they would serve a meal or two a day. They would have their own officers, and then one from each one of these associations would belong to the Six Companies which acted as a court to decide problems."

Swent: "Now this was in San Francisco?"

Liu: "To decide problems within San Francisco's Chinatown."

Swent: "Is there anything similar to that in Oakland?"

Liu: "They would have offshoots of those organizations, in Oakland. ... I would say that San Francisco would probably be the headquarters for most of those organizations. I can remember a time when some of those organizations were made up of very hostile people. And they would cause a lot of friction between family groups. And they used to call them 'Tong Wars.' And actually, people could be killed by some reaction that they took among themselves. And they were really not within the law. And the American courts would be very lax about accepting a Chinese case and if you have heard, a Chinese only had a 'Chinaman's chance' in court. But most of the problems in Chinatown were settled within the Six Companies. Or actually, if it was one family against another, then the two families would come together and talk and try to solve problems, between the two people."

Swent: [Asks Mrs. Liu if she is familiar with Willard Chow's dissertation on the development of Oakland's Chinatown. She hasn't heard of him. One point he made was that Oakland's Chinatown lacked the controlling organization of a Chinese Six Companies, as in San Francisco. Mrs. Liu notes that many Oakland Chinese associations were satellites of groups in San Francisco's Chinatown. Many Chinese resettled in Oakland after the earthquake.]

[Lew Hing converted to Christianity late in life. He was affiliated with the 8th Street Presbyterian Church. Mrs. Liu notes that local churches stressed the youth and often organized 'Chinese Schools' for Chinese language and culture. Was Lew Hing partially responsible for establishing Oakland's Chinatown? Mrs. Liu feels yes, due to his location on 8th Street. She reiterates anecdote about buying this home from the owner. This property became an annex to the Chinese Presbyterian Church.]

[Interview is interrupted as Mrs. Liu receives a telephone call.]

Mrs. Liu: "My grandfather commuted every day to the cannery by ferry and either the S.P. train or the Seventh Street. Because this was at Twelfth."

Swent: "He commuted from-"

Liu: "From San Francisco, to go to the cannery, every day... before the earthquake. So he commuted himself. [Later when he lived in Oakland he purchased beautiful cars and had one of his sons chauffeur him to work. He never learned to drive. Mrs. Liu's mother drove, and was in fact one of the first to drive in Oakland.]

Swent: "Was she? That's very interesting isn't it? So he allowed his daughters to be liberated?"

Liu: "Yes, yes, he allowed her. My mother was always kind of amazed too. She used to talk about how her father used to let her go ... to Los Angeles and Portland by herself, you know? In those days, that was kind of unheard of. But he encouraged her to just get away by herself [laughs]."

Swent: "Now what about her mother? Was she an old-fashioned Chinese lady?"

Liu: "Uh-hmm. There's her picture-"

Swent: "Oh my."

Liu: "Ok now, when she came to this country, she's only 17 years-old. And when she was younger the girls were not given formal education."

Swent: "Oh never."

Liu: "Never. Never."

Swent: "Embroidery!"

Liu: "So they learned embroidery, they learned to paint pictures and she learned to sew. And oh, she used to <u>really</u>---she was very slow and very meticulous in what she did. But oh, she used to make these frog buttons, you know. Every time I saw her, she always had a little sack, sewing. She had all kinds of Chinese dresses but they were mostly in conservative colors. And she would either be making the collars lower, or the sleeves shorter, [laughs] or the skirts shorter, or taking it in this way. Or cutting the sleeves this way. And it was amazing what she did because she would use stationary paste, with a little brush.... And she would pick the seam and she would brush this seam with the paste. And let it dry. And it would be stiff. And then she would stitch on that. She used to have a little

treadle machine and she would stitch on that and it makes a beautiful seam."

Swent: "You stiffen it first?"

Liu: "You stiffen it, so it wouldn't ravel."

Swent: "For heaven's sake...."

Liu: "And then she used to make these beautiful frog buttons and of course she taught me and I learned how, she taught me step by step. But you know, I was too young at that time and it was not as if I was making them all the time...."

Swent: "Now did she learn English at all?"

Liu: "No, she didn't. No her life was more confined to her home and her family and she had sons and daughters that would take her wherever she wanted to go. But most of her social activities were around the family."

Swent: "Were her feet bound?"

Liu: "Yes. She had a very difficult time getting around. And I could remember her peeling the calluses from the bottoms of her feet. They were just, oh so painful for her to walk."

Swent: "She must have been terribly homesick for China."

Liu: "No, she wasn't, no she wasn't. ...the family went back to China before the earthquake."

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Tape 1, Side 2

Liu: "...[My grandfather] attended formal civic events that included the inner circle of Jimmy Rolf at that time, who was Mayor of San Francisco. So he became very American in his ways. He had no desire to return to China and he really loved America."

Swent: "But your grandmother didn't ever get in with this outside-"

Liu: "Well I think it was because of the restriction of her language. She had friends who were peers and they were like her, they all spoke Chinese. And I used to call her, she and her sorority girls [laughs]. But they all spoke

Chinese, not too much in English. You see. Now if she needed to go and buy something, one of us would take her to buy. And she was one of these ladies that bobbed her hair very short during the flapper age. Yeah, she was one of the first because at one time the Chinese people just never cut their hair. It was just something they never did. But she wanted to buy dresses and she had a hard time fitting because she was so small. ...she liked to dress up."

Swent: "Now, did she have Chinese servants in her home?"

Liu: "She had help at home, mainly cooks. And then I remember she had-"

Swent: "Newly arrived people from China?"

Liu: "No. In fact, a Japanese man was her housekeeper. He didn't live in but he came in, every so often to clean house. And then she would have a Chinese cook to cook the food. She never had to do anything [laughs]!"

Swent: "No, no, she wouldn't be able to go out to a market or anything like that."

Liu: "Well, if she needed anything it was either delivered to her, but she would never go to a market.... [She notes that there were few supermarkets back then.]

Swent: "But your mother grew up then with both cultures.... Your mother would have had to know Chinese to speak with her mother."

Liu: "Yes, correct, correct."

Swent: "But your father encouraged her to be quite Western, obviously."

Liu: "My mother?"

Swent: "Your mother."

Liu: "Oh, my mother is absolutely all Western. You should see her. She has more energy than I have.... She is not one for Chinese customs and neither was my grandmother, not too much. I think the only time any customs came into the family was during New Year's, New Year's celebration."

Swent: "It's interesting: I have the feeling that a lot of these observances of national holidays and customs and so on are much more a feeling of people now than they were a generation ago."

Liu: "I would say this.... The people when they came from China, for instance, they came over say fifty or sixty years

ago, they had all these festivals and celebrations that were in connection with the harvest or the planting and so forth. And they brought these ideas to this country. And some of them continued to celebrate these holidays. In fact, I think right now they're eating moon cakes because it's harvest time. But if you go to China, they're not doing these things anymore [laughs]. They're not doing these things anymore! But we're still, they're more 'Chinesey' in their celebration here in San Francisco than they are say in Hong Kong. I remember my father said one time he liked to see how Chinese New Years is celebrated in China. So he made a trip and they stayed purposely, they stayed in Hong Kong for two months ... to see how it's done. And he [slight laugh] was taken back a bit because they just don't do a lot of popping of firecrackers, and they don't do so much of entertaining, like families getting together, four, five or six times ... and numbers of families getting together and doing these kinds of things. [....] *[Ed. note: What would her father have observed in their ancestral villages of Kwangtung Province?]*

[Liu and Swent discuss this further. Swent tries to recall the saying about the colonial English, and how much more English they were.]

Liu: "...because you see, this is all they remember from China fifty or sixty years ago. And they haven't had a chance to go back to see what really is going on back there. And they cling to these old traditions. [Communist China discouraged traditional customs and family ties. "The government is practically their God, I guess." She talks about Mao and how, practically speaking, his form of communism worked in China. It was difficult, however, for the Chinese people who had a Western education and outlook as they were brought down to the same level, to bare necessities. Swent wonders if there is a distinction between newly-arrived immigrants, who have lived under communism, and the older settled Chinese-Americans. Liu notes that many students come here to study our farming techniques and then return to China. Swent mentions that many ethnic Chinese are coming here via Southeast Asia.]

[Mrs. Liu discusses newly-arrived immigrants who continue to wear traditional dress. The two women discuss problems of Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrants at some length. Mrs. Liu worked as a social worker for the YWCA in San Francisco in the 1960s. They had problems with 'Hong Kong brides" who brought bad habits. Groups of traditional musicians formed throughout Chinatown. At the Y they sponsored a group through a Ford Foundation grant. She mentions strategies to acculturate newly-arrived young men and women. Swent notes that Hong Kong brides now are very stylish and sophisticated. In Hong Kong there is quite an influence from Parisian *haute couture*. Oakland is considered quite a

backwater---San Franciscans in general are more sophisticated than people in Oakland. Mrs. Liu observes that urban areas are deteriorating and thus cities are often less-desirable places to live. They both note the differences between the earlier community of blacks and the newer arrivals.

Liu felt that the Hong Kong brides (in the 60s) made Chinatown revert back to earlier ways. As Chinese are acculturated and move out to the suburbs, newer arrivals take over and the community continues to have the same problems as during an earlier time. It is a cycle.

Mrs. Liu discusses Mainland China at some length. When she visited relatives she tried to encourage them to think for themselves. She told them that the cultural programming and political control of communist China would not last forever. She urged her sister-in-law to hold on to family treasures and not give them away. Mrs. Liu's father-in-law collected books. The Red Guard would come into their house and arbitrarily select books and take them away.

The Lius have two children, a son and a daughter. Both married Caucasians. This hurt Mrs. Liu at first but she has now become accustomed to it. "In my generation, we were taught where our place was. You were taught not to intermarry into another race, not only that but not to intermarry into another ethnic, Chinese group, you see." Her grandchildren don't look Chinese at all.]

End of formal interview

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